

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L 1857

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, NL
SUBJ: DEN UYL ON GOVERNMENT COLLAPSE

1. PRIME MINISTER TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT TWO WEEKS AGO COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. THIS WAS AMONG OTHER TOPICS INCLUDING NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS (TO BE REPORTED BY SEPTTEL) ON WHICH HE COMMENTED AT LUNCH WITH ME APRIL 6.

2. DEN UYL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IF HE HAD BEEN WILLING TO COMPROMISE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIS LABOR PARTY AND ITS PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION, THE CDA, OVER COMPENSATION FOR EXPROPRIATED LAND, THE COLLAPSE OF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED. HE CHOSE CONFRONTATION, HE SAID, BECAUSE THE CDA PUSHED THE ISSUE AS A TEST OF ITS STRENGTH AS REFLECTED IN RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. THE CDA PERCEIVED THE ISSUE AS A LOW RISK CHALLENGE, GAMBLING THAT THE LABOR MAJORITY WOULD NOT PERMIT IT TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER DID ALLOW, IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, THAT THE CDA MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN ONE OF SOME OTHER PENDING LEGISLATIVE BILLS, --E.G., VAD, WORKS COUNCILS--TO MANEUVER INTO CONFRONTATION. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY MORE VULNERABLE IF HE HAD BLINKED ON THE LAND BILL. IN WEIGHING HIS DECISION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES HE TWICE SAID HE WAS SATISFIED HE HAD

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MADE THE RIGHT DECISION,

3. LOOKING TOWARD ELECTIONS ON MAY 25, DE UYL SAID HE RATED HIS CHANCES TO BE RETURNED AS PRIME MINISTER AT A SURPRISINGLY MODEST QTE FIFTY PERCENT UNQTE. MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING HIS CRITICS, WOULD PEG THEM HIGHER. HE INTENDS

TO CAMPAIGN AGGRESSIVELY, HE SAID, IMPLYING CLEARLY HE WILL PLACE ALL BLAME FOR A PARALYZED GOVERNMENT SQUARELY ON THE CDA AND PARTICULARLY ITS LIST LEADER AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER VAN AGT. THE LABOR PARTY WILL BE AIMING FOR THIRTY PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE(IT WAS TWENTY-SEVEN-PLUS IN 1972) WHICH DEN UYL SAYS WILL INCREASE THEIR NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS SUFFICIENTLY TO CALL THE SHOTS IN CARVING OUT THE CABINET PORTFOLIOS.

4. COMMENT. IF DEN UYL'S VERSION OF THE BREAKUP AND ITS ANTECEDENT IS CORRECT, IT IS ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION OF HIS POLITICAL AGILITY AND SHOULD BE AN EXAMPLE TO THOSE LESS SURE OF FOOT, BUT I WOULD GUESS WON'T BE. RATING HIS CHANCES OF CONTINUING AS PRIME MINISTER AT 50 PERCENT, MANY WOULD SAY, IS TO POORMOUTH IT AND IS DONE MORE AS A MEANS OF NOT APPEARING COCKSURE. AT THE SAME TIME HE WILL AVOID LOOKING AS THOUGH HE'S RUNNING SCARED. I MEASURE HIM AS BEING SUPREMELY CONFIDENT.

MCCLOSKEY

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